

Commonwealth of Kentucky

Office of the Governor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Governor declares State of Emergency in wake of strong winter storms

Governor to visit hard-hit regions tomorrow

Dangerous conditions in the wake of major winter storms in Central and Eastern Kentucky led Gov. Steve Beshear this morning to declare a State of Emergency for the state, enabling the mobilization of state resources to assist impacted communities. Strong winter storms with heavy snow hit central and eastern parts of Kentucky last night, resulting in broken trees, road closures, stranded motorists, flooding, public and private property damage and power outages to approximately 106,000 customers. Weather radar indicates potential localized snowfall amounts of up to 16 inches.

Gov. Beshear's declaration triggers necessary state resources and allows out-of-state utility crews to move into the state to restore power. By noon, some counties were beginning to see power restored, however it may take several days to restore all of the power, depending on the weather.

"State government is moving quickly to assist those in need of help from these powerful storms," Gov. Beshear said. "Though we often wish for a white Christmas, in reality these storms can put Kentuckians in danger, and my administration is marshalling all its resources to address the needs of those impacted."

Gov. Beshear spoke with local officials in the hard hit counties and, depending on the weather, will visit Letcher, Pike and Perry counties tomorrow to view the impacted areas, as well as the state's response. Details of the trip will be released early tomorrow morning.

Earlier this morning the Kentucky Division of Emergency Management (KYEM) activated the Commonwealth Emergency Operations Center. Emergency Management teams, working in conjunction with local first responders and members of the Kentucky National Guard, opened shelters, rescued stranded motorists and began supporting a massive effort by local and state road crews to clear roads.

"Once again, local and state officials have moved swiftly in response to yet another weather crisis," said KYEM Director, BG John W. Heltzel. "Our biggest challenge is to reopen the roads to allow utility repair crews access, and our Kentucky National Guard troops are helping the local emergency officials with that mission."

KYEM and the Commonwealth Emergency Operations Center (CEOC), located in Frankfort, remain activated at a heightened level of alert, with additional staffing throughout the day and night. The CEOC will activate to a higher level if necessary. KYEM continues to maintain situational awareness and communications with KYEM Regional Response Managers, Department of Transportation Operation Center, Kentucky State Police and the Office of Gov. Beshear.

Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) crews, working ahead of the storm, applied anti-icing "pretreatment" to roadways in most Department of Highways districts earlier in the week. By Friday night, snow-plow contractors also were mobilized and pressed into service. Plowing continued into Saturday - mostly in counties along and east of Interstate 75 by Saturday afternoon. Snow was heaviest and most problematic in the higher elevations of the easternmost Jackson, Manchester and Pikeville highway districts. Primary routes were mostly cleared or passable, but fallen trees hampered crews on secondary routes in Pike, Knott, Breathitt and Perry counties. Crews in Pike County had to cope with the added challenge of power outages at their maintenance buildings.

Acting Transportation Secretary Mike Hancock said road clearing was going according to plan. "Our maintenance crews are well-trained for weather emergencies. They began working days in advance of this storm to pre-treat road surfaces and bridge decks with anti-icing materials. They worked through the night, and are still at work today and will continue working until the storm passes," Hancock said.

Road conditions throughout the state can be found on the Kentucky Department of Transportation's Web site at www.511.ky.gov, or by calling 511 in Kentucky or 1-866-737-3767 for out-of-state callers.

Gov. Beshear urged all Kentuckians to remain alert and continue to monitor their local broadcasting stations and weather alert radios. "If you do not have to travel, stay in," he said. "If you must travel, use caution and drive slow, maintaining extra stopping distance."

Additional information and winter safety tips, including winter driving tips, can be found on the KYEM web site at www.kyem.ky.gov <<http://www.kyem.ky.gov>> . Winter weather warnings and advisories remain in effect for several counties; specific county weather information at www.weather.gov <<http://www.weather.gov>> .

The State of Emergency issued today by Gov. Beshear:

- * Orders the Division of Emergency Management (DEM) to coordinate the response of state agencies and private relief organizations, and requires all other state agencies to coordinate their efforts through the DEM;

- * Gives the Adjutant General the authorization to mobilize any needed National Guard personnel and equipment;

- * Directs the Finance and Administration Cabinet to fund costs incurred in executing the Order;

- * Authorizes the DEM to request federal assistance that may be available;

- * Orders the DEM to consult with the American National Red Cross and local officials to determine the need for emergency shelter;

- * Allows the restriction of access to public roadways in the interest of public health and safety; and

* Activates the Kentucky Community Crisis Response Board network of trained counselors.

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